

The News - Banner

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FRIDAY, DECEMBER 15, 2023 BLUFFTON, INDIANA • Wells County's Hometown Connection \$1.00



Toddlers in a Winter Wonderland

The gym inside of Bluffton City Hall overflowed with Christmas spirit on Thursday. Families first enjoyed toddler time in the gym. The annual Winter Wonderland event, also hosted by the Bluffton Parks Department in the city gym, featured pictures with Santa and Mrs. Claus, a bounce house, themed blow-up decorations, and a wide range of themed games.

Above, all little Callen wanted for Christmas was his mom, Kaylee Arnold, to scoop him up instead of Santa. Above right, Easton Gerber was too in awe of Mrs. Claus to sit in the audience during story time.

At right, Baby Millie was a Christmas or two too young for the bounce house, however, she found an adventure with Mrs. Claus. Below, Children of all ages joined in to go "ice fishing," a creative game made with magnets and fishing poles. (Photos by Sydney Kent)



Bluffton teen pleads guilty to dealing fentanyl

By SYDNEY KENT

A man from Bluffton pled guilty after he sold over 19 grams of fentanyl to a confidential informant earlier this year. Two grams of fentanyl is considered a lethal dose for the average adult.

Malvern Bozarth, 19, was charged with dealing a narcotic drug in 10 or more grams, a Level 2 felony, and possession of a firearm, a Level 4 felony. According to a probable cause affidavit, the charges were filed after detectives with the Bluffton Police Department arranged for a confidential informant to purchase pills from Bozarth at



Malvern Bozarth

(Continued on Page 2)

GOP gubernatorial candidates tackle policy questions

By CASEY SMITH, Indiana Capital Chronicle

Indiana's Republican gubernatorial candidates continued to carve out their own policy paths while speaking at an Indianapolis legislative conference Wednesday, where they fielded questions about public safety, school choice and taxes.

The five hopefuls, who took a few shots at each other, are vying for the GOP nomination in the race for the state's top elected seat in 2024.

The candidates did not debate against one another during the forum, instead individually introducing themselves and responding to four questions from a moderator.

Participating candidates included former Secretary of Com-

(Continued on Page 2)

Men charged with killing 3,600 birds, including bald and golden eagles, to sell

By MATTHEW BROWN and AMY BETH HANSON
Associated Press

Two men killed about 3,600 birds, including bald and golden eagles, during a "killing spree" on Montana's Flathead Indian Reservation and elsewhere, then sold eagle parts on a black market that has been a long-running problem for U.S. wildlife officials, a federal grand jury indictment says.

The men worked with others to hunt and kill the birds, according to the indictment, and in at least one instance used a dead deer to lure in an eagle that was shot. The two defendants conspired with others who weren't named to sell eagle feathers, tails,

wings and other parts for "significant sums of cash" across the United States and elsewhere, the indictment said.

Simon Paul, 42, of St. Ignatius, Montana and Travis John Branson, 48, of Cusick, Washington, face 13 counts of unlawful trafficking of bald and golden eagles and one count each of conspiracy and violating wildlife trafficking laws.

Text messages obtained by investigators showed Branson and others telling buyers he was "on a killing spree" to collect more eagle tail feathers for future sales, according to the indictment that described Paul as a "shooter" for Branson.

(Continued on Page 2)

Confident Putin says there will be no peace in Ukraine until Russia's goals are met

By HARRIET MORRIS
Associated Press

MOSCOW (AP) — Emboldened by battlefield gains and flagging Western support for Ukraine, a relaxed and confident President Vladimir Putin said Thursday there would be no peace until Russia achieves its goals, which he says remain unchanged after nearly two years of fighting.

It was Putin's first formal news conference that Western media were allowed to attend since the Kremlin sent troops into Ukraine in February 2022. The highly choreographed session, which lasted over four hours and included questions from ordinary Russians about things like the price of eggs and leaky gymnasium roofs, was more about

(Continued on Page 2)



Sleigh of entertainers

On Saturday, Dec. 16, at 2:30 p.m. and again at 5 p.m. "Joyful Sounds Christmas" program will be presented in the auditorium at Life Community Church. Santa and his elves will be available for photos in the sleigh and refreshments also will be offered. Above, pictured left to right are Ralph Tuttle, Dave Schultz (narrator), Lisa Rich, Jonie Cincotta, Dave Shepherd and Otto "Tank" Lowe with Curt Alspaugh in front.



At left, Joni Cincotta and Lish Rich rehearsed "Rudolph the Red Nosed Reindeer." (Photos by Barbara Barbieri)

Inside

Local/Area

Obituaries 3
Police Notebook . . . 3

Opinion

Christine Flowers . . 4

Also...

Sports 6-7
Classifieds 7
Diversions 5

Outside

Sunny and warmer today, cloudy and breezy tonight

Today	Saturday	Sunday
High 54	High 51	High 48
Low 33	Low 40	Low 35

More Weather on Page 2

Online

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Vol. 95 No. 38

FRIDAY
December 15, 2023

RACING NEWS

NASCAR Stay on track with the latest news from the

- Nascar Circuit
- Formula 1
- Indy Car

Every **Thursday & Friday** in the News-Banner

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Man pleads guilty

(Continued from Page 1)
his home.

The informant reportedly wore audio and visual devices during the purchase. An officer noted that Bozarth did not count the money, approximately \$1,000, before the informant left his residence with the pills. A search warrant was obtained after the purchase.

The following day, officers executed the search warrant at Bozarth's residence while he was at work. A firearm was located, which then led to an additional charge.

Despite his age, Bozarth has a significant criminal history that began as a young teenager. According to court documents, he was tried and convicted as an adult in 2021 for charges related to the dealing and possession of both drugs and firearms. Bozarth, who 17-years-old at the time, was charged with dealing a schedule IV controlled substance between 10 and 28 grams, a Level 3 felony, two counts of dealing a controlled substance, both Level 5 felonies, dealing marijuana, a Class A misdemeanor,

and dangerous possession of a firearm, a Level 6 felony.

Bozarth was sentenced to two years at the Indiana Department of Correction with one year suspended under one of the Level 5 felonies. All other charges were dismissed as part of a plea agreement made with the state.

Under Indiana law, Bozarth's combined charges in this case carry a potential of up to 42 years in prison. Sentencing is scheduled early next year in the Wells Circuit Court.

sydney@news-banner.com

Gubernatorial candidates

(Continued from Page 1)
merce Brad Chambers, Lt. Gov. Suzanne Crouch, Fort Wayne businessman Eric Doden and former Attorney General Curtis Hill. U.S. Sen. Mike Braun was missing from the group — away in Washington, D.C. alongside other federal lawmakers — but his pre-recorded video responses were played for each question.

Braun changes stance on qualified immunity

The GOP contenders were first asked about their plans to improve public safety and where they stood, specifically, on qualified immunity — a controversial standard that protects police officers and other government officials from being sued for alleged misconduct.

Hill cited his career spent as a local prosecutor and maintained that, if elected governor, he would ensure law enforcement has the "resources, training and protection" they need "to protect our public and our safety." He did not, however, address qualified immunity head-on.

Crouch said there would be "no discussion" or action limiting qualified immunity at the state level. She also emphasized the importance of addressing mental illness and addiction — as well as providing regular mental health checkups for first responders.

Doden, on the other hand, vowed to protect qualified immunity: "You should not be able to be sued, personally, for doing your job."

"We have to make sure we support those who protect us," he continued, adding that Indiana's governor should play an active role in recruiting young people to join law enforcement.

Chambers agreed, saying

police officers "don't do it for the money — they do it to serve." He said qualified immunity "needs to be codified in state law."

Braun said he wants it codified, too. Doing so will help "get rid of frivolous lawsuits" filed against law enforcement officers.

Although Braun said he prefers to see such a policy enacted at the national level, that's a change from his previous statements in 2020, when the senator said the interpretation of the qualified immunity standard was "overly broad" and "allows law enforcement in many of the high-profile excessive force and abuse of power cases to avoid civil suits."

A previous bill he introduced in the U.S. Senate would have allowed qualified immunity to be used as a defense only if the officer's conduct is already protected by law or a previous court ruling.

At the time, Braun said "... it straddles that balance between eliminating frivolous lawsuits" while allowing people whose rights have been violated to make a case.

He later backed away from the proposal.

"Axe" the tax?

A bold proposal from Crouch to eliminate Indiana's personal income tax was also discussed — and critiqued — by the gubernatorial slate.

Crouch's mantra holds that the tax can be "axed" completely without raising any other taxes on Hoosiers. Crouch's plan calls for a "reasonably necessary" reserve fund, along with identifying and eliminating "wasteful government spending," but other specific details remain scant.

Even so, she doubled down Wednesday that tax

dollars saved by Hoosiers would go back into the state economy. The move would also incentivize workers and companies to move to Indiana, Crouch said.

Chambers said he agreed with a plan to reduce taxes over time, but not in a single, extreme swoop. He said at least some personal income tax proceeds should be invested into "needs of the state," like health care and education.

Chambers additionally said reducing income taxes could cause property taxes to go "too high."

"I hear from Hoosiers right now about property taxes, not income taxes ... we don't want to cut muscle," he said.

Hill said he liked the sound of income tax elimination, but making it happen "will take a lot of maneuvering — and time." The candidate alternatively supports reductions to gas and corporation taxes. He's also proposed a personal income tax elimination for young people and seniors.

Braun was more targeted, saying Crouch's plan "was probably done without thoroughly thinking through that it's one-third of our state revenue."

"Obviously, you cannot axe the tax," he said, noting he is committed, though, to curbing state agency spending.

Doden was also skeptical. "I cannot in good faith tell you we're going to axe the tax unless there was a replacement tax or revenue source," he said.

Doubling down on 'school choice'

All five candidates support ongoing Indiana GOP efforts to expand "school choice" options for parents, including the state's near-

universal private school voucher program.

Chambers said Hoosier parents "need to be front and center in their kids' education."

"We've made progress on choice, and we need to make more progress," he said, adding that education statewide needs to better prepare students to fill Indiana's growing skilled workforce demands.

Doden said although some have criticized Indiana's voucher and charter school options, Hoosier educators he's talked to say "the competition" public schools face "has actually made them better."

Crouch said she would "continue to be a big proponent of school choice" as governor, but cautioned that "choice" will look different in the future, given that the K-12 experience in Indiana is shifting now toward more hands-on and work-based learning options.

Hill said "choice is vital," but focused more on what kids are taught. The candidate said he opposes "gender ideology programs and social justice" in the classroom, and that "we need to teach children how to think critically."

Along similar lines, Braun said "parents need to be the main stakeholders in their own kids' education," noting, too, that K-12 instruction "needs to get back where basic education is taught to our kids."

He further echoed the other candidates' calls for expanded career training for high schoolers, as well.

"Some things need a four-year degree, two-year degree — most of it needs a better high school education," Braun said. "I'll make that a number one priority."

Deadline for Christmas Eve, Day events

Christmas Eve and Christmas Day church and community events should be sent to The News-Banner by 5 p.m. Monday, Dec. 18. A list of events will appear in the Thursday, Dec. 21 edition of the The News-Banner.

Both religious and non-religious events can be included. Please also send church service information if there is a change in regular worship schedules due to the holiday.

Information should include:

- The name and address of the church.
- Times and dates for all events.
- Any specific details about the event planned.
- A contact phone number (N-B use only)

Information can be submitted by email at email@news-banner.com, or brought into the N-B's office at 125 N. Johnson St. in Bluffton. Information may be edited for length or grammar.

Weather

Friday, December 15, 2023

(24-hour observations at 9:34 p.m. Thursday)

High: 48; Low: 23; Precipitation: None

Wabash River Level (at the Main Street bridge): 1.17 feet at 10:45 p.m. Thursday

Wells County forecast

Today: Sunny, with a high near 54. Southwest wind around 5 mph.

Tonight: Mostly cloudy, with a low around 33. Southeast wind around 5 mph.

Saturday: Mostly cloudy, with a high near 51. Southeast wind around 10 mph.

Saturday Night: A 50 percent chance of rain. Cloudy, with a low around 40. South wind 10 to 15 mph, with gusts as high as 20 mph.

Sunday: A 40 percent chance of rain. Mostly cloudy, with a high near 48.

Sunday Night: A 30 percent chance of showers. Mostly cloudy, with a low around 35.

Monday: A chance of rain showers before 1 p.m., then a chance of rain and snow showers. Partly sunny, with a high near 39. Breezy. Chance of precipitation is 30 percent.

Monday Night: A 20 percent chance of snow showers before 1 a.m. Partly cloudy, with a low around 22. Blustery.

Tuesday: Sunny, with a high near 37.

Tuesday Night: Mostly clear, with a low around 23.

Wednesday: Mostly sunny, with a high near 42.

Wednesday Night: Mostly cloudy, with a low around 27.

Thursday: Partly sunny, with a high near 44.

Russia goals

(Continued from Page 1)
spectacle than scrutiny.

But while using the show as an opportunity to reinforce his authority ahead of an election in March that he is all but certain to win, Putin also gave a few rare details on what Moscow calls its "special military operation" in Ukraine.

He said that a steady influx of volunteers means there is no need for a second wave of mobilization of reservists to fight in Ukraine — a move that was deeply unpopular. He said there are some 617,000 Russian soldiers there, including around 244,000 troops who were mobilized a year ago to fight alongside professional forces.

"There will be peace when we will achieve our goals," Putin said, repeating a frequent Kremlin line. "Victory will be ours."

Putin, who has held power for nearly 24 years and announced last week he is running for reelection, was greeted with applause

as he arrived in the hall in central Moscow. He didn't hold his traditional news conference last year amid setbacks in Ukraine.

But with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy pleading for more U.S. aid amid a stalling counteroffensive and fracturing Western support, he decided to face reporters once more — even though only two Western journalists were called on for questions.

Putin highlighted Russia's successes in Ukraine and the flagging support by Kyiv's allies.

"Ukraine today produces nearly nothing, they are trying to preserve something but they don't produce practically anything themselves and bring everything in for free," he said. "But the freebies may end at some point and apparently it's coming to an end little by little."

Putin noted "an improvement in the position of our troops all along" the front line.

Men charged with killing birds

(Continued from Page 1)

The indictment said the killings began in January 2015 and continued until 2021 near Ronan, Montana, on the Flathead Reservation, home of the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes. It did not say how many of the 3,600 birds killed were eagles.

Illegal shootings are a leading cause of golden eagle deaths, according to a recent government study.

"We just hope that if these individuals are proven guilty that it will serve as a warning to others that we are watching," said Rich Janssen, director of the tribes' Natural Resources Department. He said that members of the tribes use eagle feathers for traditional dress and in honor ceremonies.

Tribal law enforcement was involved in the investigation of Paul and Branson, but Janssen did not know why it so long for them to be charged.

Bald eagles are the national symbol of the United States, and both bald and golden eagles are widely considered sacred by American Indians. U.S. law prohibits anyone without a permit from killing, wounding or disturbing eagles or taking any parts such as nests or eggs. Even taking feathers found in the wild can be a crime.

Federally recognized tribes can apply for permits with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to take a bald or golden eagle for religious purposes, and enrolled tribal members can apply for eagle feathers and other parts from the National Eagle Repository. But there's a lengthy backlog of requests, according to Janssen and two independent eagle researchers.

The researchers said that backlog could be driving the black market for eagle parts. Feathers from young golden eagles are especially in high

demand, with waits as long as five years to receive them from the repository, said researcher Bryan Bedrosian with the Teton Raptor Center in Wilson, Wyoming.

Addressing those delays could help reduce the illegal trade in eagle parts, said Rob Domenech, executive director of Raptor View Research Institute in Missoula, Montana.

Bald eagles were killed off across most of the U.S. last century, due in large part to the pesticide DDT, but flourished under federal protections and came off the endangered species list in 2007. Their population has been rapidly increasing in recent years. Golden eagle populations are less secure, and researchers say shootings, energy development, lead poisoning and other problems have pushed the species to the brink of decline.

First Presbyterian Church Special Christmas Concert and Worship Service

Featuring the A440 Strings from Fort Wayne Philharmonic
Saturday, December 17 • Concert at 10 AM • Worship Service at 10:30 AM



The A440 Strings, all members of the Fort Wayne Philharmonic, will perform Traditional Christmas music and other seasonal music.

Violinist Pablo Vasquez • Violinist Alexandre Tsilibes
Violist Kristin Westover • Cellist Brian Klickman

First Presbyterian Church in Bluffton is located at 215 E. Dustman Road.
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OBITUARIES

Thomas Springer, 75

Thomas Ernst Springer, 75, of Tampa, Fla., and formerly of Bluffton, died Tuesday Oct. 17, 2023, at 12:15 p.m. in Tampa.

He was born April 28, 1948, to Ernst Springer and Bertha "Betty" Mae Lehman Springer in the Lutheran Hospital of Fort Wayne. He married Suellen Little Oct. 11, 1982.

He is survived by daughter, Rebecca (Kelly) Thompson of Bluffton; son, Scott (Sally) Springer from his first wife, Carol Betz Springer Myers; son, Chad (Tomoko) of Kasugia, Japan; daughter, Heather Springer of Homosassa Fla.; grandchildren, Lynsey (Brandon) Simanteris, Ryan (Dillon) Whitelaw, Megan (Alex) Gump, Brody and Lucy Springer, Luke and Rio Springer; great-grandchildren Jaiden and Bryson Whitelaw, and Arya Simanteris. He is also survived by brothers, Timothy (Patricia) Springer of Fort Wayne, Terry (Donna) Springer of Fort Wayne, Duane (Karen) Springer of Fort Wayne, and sister, Carol Wilneski of Fort Wayne. He was preceded death by his parents and a sister, Linda Gallmeyer of Fort Wayne.

A celebration of life is being planned for the end of January at the Calvary Lutheran Church in Bluffton.

Memorials may be made in Tom's name to American Diabetes Association or to offset the cost of final arrangements directed to Calvary Lutheran Church, 1532 N. Main St. in Bluffton in care of Carol Myers.

Ronald G. Stewart, 63



Ronald G. Stewart, 63, passed away Tuesday evening, Dec. 12, 2023, at his residence in Bluffton, following an extended illness.

Ron was born in Bluffton on March 9, 1960, to Donald "Gene" Stewart and Judith A. (Murray) Stewart, both parents survive in Poneto. He married Alicia J. (Martin) Feb. 4, 1992, she survives in Bluffton.

Ron was a 1979 graduate of Southern Wells High School. He was a forklift operator for Majestic Manufacturing for many years and was a part-time driver for Family Ford of Bluffton. He enjoyed being outdoors, camping, cooking over his firepit, playing softball and bowling.

In addition to his parents and wife, he is survived by one son, Adam Stewart of Bluffton; three grandchildren, Haylee Couch, Brandon Stewart and Josalyn Stewart; and two sisters, Carol (Bruce Smith) Nestleroad of Craigville and Rhonda Stewart of Berne.

He was preceded in death by a brother, Larry Stewart in 2020.

In accordance with Ron's wishes, there will be no public services at this time. A public memorial gathering will be announced at a later date.

Memorials can be made in Ron's memory to Friends Who Care Cancer Relief and should be directed to the funeral home.

Online condolences can be made at www.goodwin-cale-harnish.com.

Funeral arrangements have been entrusted to the Goodwin - Cale & Harnish Memorial Chapel in Bluffton.

Kimberli D. Kunkel, 54

Kimberli D. Kunkel, 54, of Tampa, Fla., and a longtime resident of Bluffton, died Wednesday morning, Dec. 13, 2023, at Melech Hospice Home in Temple Terrace, Fla.

Funeral arrangements are currently pending at this time with the Thoma/Rich, Lemler Funeral Home in Bluffton.

Wayne E. Penrod, 92

Wayne E. Penrod, 92, of Poneto died Thursday morning, Dec. 14, 2023, at Stillwater Hospice Home in Fort Wayne.

Funeral arrangements are pending at this time with the Thoma/Rich, Lemler Funeral Home in Bluffton.

Sen. Zay to propose fetal dependent income tax exemption

By LESLIE BONILLA MUÑIZ
Indiana Capital Chronicle

State Sen. Andy Zay said Wednesday that he will introduce legislation considering fetuses dependent children — allowing expectant parents to claim an income tax exemption worth \$2,500.

Zay, who is running to represent Indiana's Third Congressional District in the U.S. House of Representatives, made the announcement in a campaign news release rather than from his sitting office.

The Republican from Huntington said the bill "further values the lives of unborn babies" and "supports parents' ability to provide for their families" by allowing Hoosiers to claim the exemption during pregnancy.

The legislation would benefit about 60,000 families annually, according to the nonpartisan Legislative Services Agency, and would save them \$7 million each year collectively.

Police Notebook

INCIDENTS

City:
Wednesday, 2:58 p.m., Bluffton High School. Car accident reported, investigation ongoing.

Wednesday, 4:35 p.m., 3600 East 200 North. Driver cited for speeding.

Wednesday, 6:03 p.m., 900 block of Lancaster Street. Caller reported it appeared items had been moved around while they were gone.

Wednesday, 7:56 p.m., Capri Meadows. Report of noisy neighbor, officer noted music was not loud enough for ordinance violation.

Wednesday, 10:14 p.m., Auto Doctor. Driver warned for headlight out, officer smelled odor of marijuana during traffic stop. Vehicle was searched and no marijuana was located.

Thursday, 5:00 a.m., North Main Street and South

Sutton Circle Drive. Caller reported a dead deer in the roadway.

Thursday, 6:41 a.m., Main and Washington streets. Claudia Stauffer advised she was distracted in traffic which caused her vehicle to collide with the rear end of Hudson Bailey's truck. The damages did not exceed \$1,001.

Thursday, 11:44 a.m., 300 block of East Central Avenue. Caller reported all four tires had been cut by box cutter or something similar.

Thursday, 11:54 a.m., Capri Meadows. Caller claimed identity theft, stated he was not the one of the paperwork and was going to the Sheriff's Department.

Thursday, 12:28 p.m., 200 block of Oak Forest Drive. Caller requested officer deliver message to pick his wife up. Caller called back to advise someone else

can pick his wife up.

County:
Wednesday, 12:55 p.m., 450 East and Ind. 116, Bluffton. Caller reported someone hit a stop sign at the intersection. State highway contacted and arrived on scene.

Thursday, 4:51 p.m., 5800 East 900 South, Keystone. Welfare check requested for infant. No answer at door, house appeared to be abandoned.

Thursday, 4:56 p.m., Sugar and West Railroad streets, Uniondale. Caller reported they found a bottle of pills on the road and wanted to turn it in. The pills were Acetaminophen, the active ingredient in Tylenol, and Aspirin.

Friday, 8:25 a.m., 1100 block of Garhard Street, Bluffton. Caller reported subjects have over 70 packages that have not been picked up, postmaster was

concerned. Officer contacted subjects who advised they were intentionally leaving packages outside due to a remodel of the home.

Friday, 11:51 a.m., Gerber Bridge. Officer tagged an abandoned vehicle. Now they're it.

Ossian:
Thursday, 11:57 p.m., 7600 North Ind. 1, Ossian. Welfare check requested for subjects. Both subjects were fine, advised they had cell phone issues.

Friday, 5:03 a.m., 10000 North 100 East, Ossian. Caller reported subject attempted to break into vehicle, unable to locate.

ARRESTS
Lyle Lee Beer, 45, Linger Inn, theft, a Class A misdemeanor. Bond set at \$1,500.
Brittney M. Bannister, 32, Bluffton, disorderly conduct, a Class B misdemeanor. Bond set at \$1,000.



Firefighter of the Year

On Dec. 13, Gatlin Sunday (right) was awarded Firefighter of the Year by Chief Gray (left). (Photo provided)

Optimist Club sponsors student essay contest

The Optimist Club of Bluffton is encouraging area students to contemplate the phrase "Optimism: How it Connects Us" as part of the Optimist International Essay Contest for the 2023-24 school year.

The Optimist Club will judge the local students' essays based on the theme a determine top winners. Winners will receive a cash award from the club and the winning essays will be sent to the district level where college scholarships are available.

Students wishing to participate in the contest can find out more by contacting the club at 260-223-0926.

"Young students today have so many fresh ideas about the world and their future," said Steve Higgins, club president.

"As Optimists, it is our goal to encourage them to do what we can to bring out the best in each of them. This gives them a wonderful opportunity to tap into their creativity and pursue possible scholarships at the same time."

The Optimist Club of Bluffton has been participating in the Optimist Oratorical Contest for over 20 years and has been active in the community since 1964. Other programs and service projects that the club is involved in includes the kiddie tractor pull, fishing contest, leadership academy and many others.

Optimist International is one of the world's largest service club organizations with over 80,000 adult and youth members in almost 3,000 clubs in the U.S., Canada, and throughout the world.

Carrying the motto "Bringing out the best in youth, our communities and in ourselves," Optimists conduct positive service projects that reach more than 6 million young people per year.

To learn more about Optimist International, please call 314-371-6000 or visit the organization's website at optimist.org.

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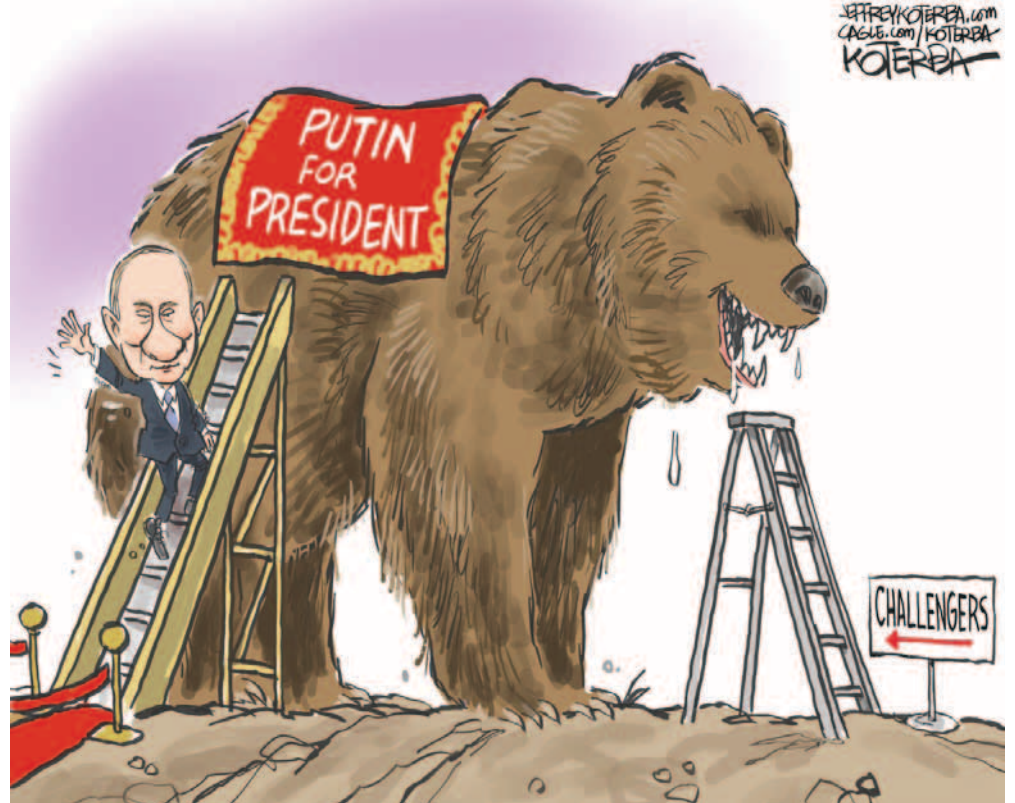
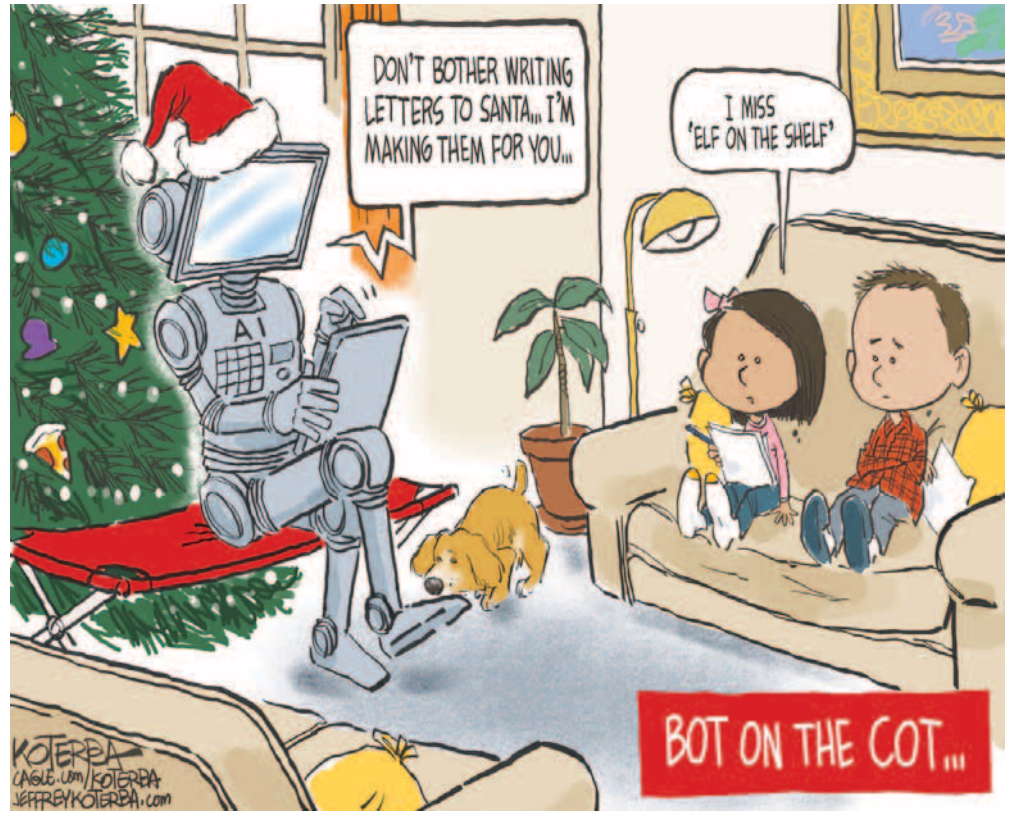
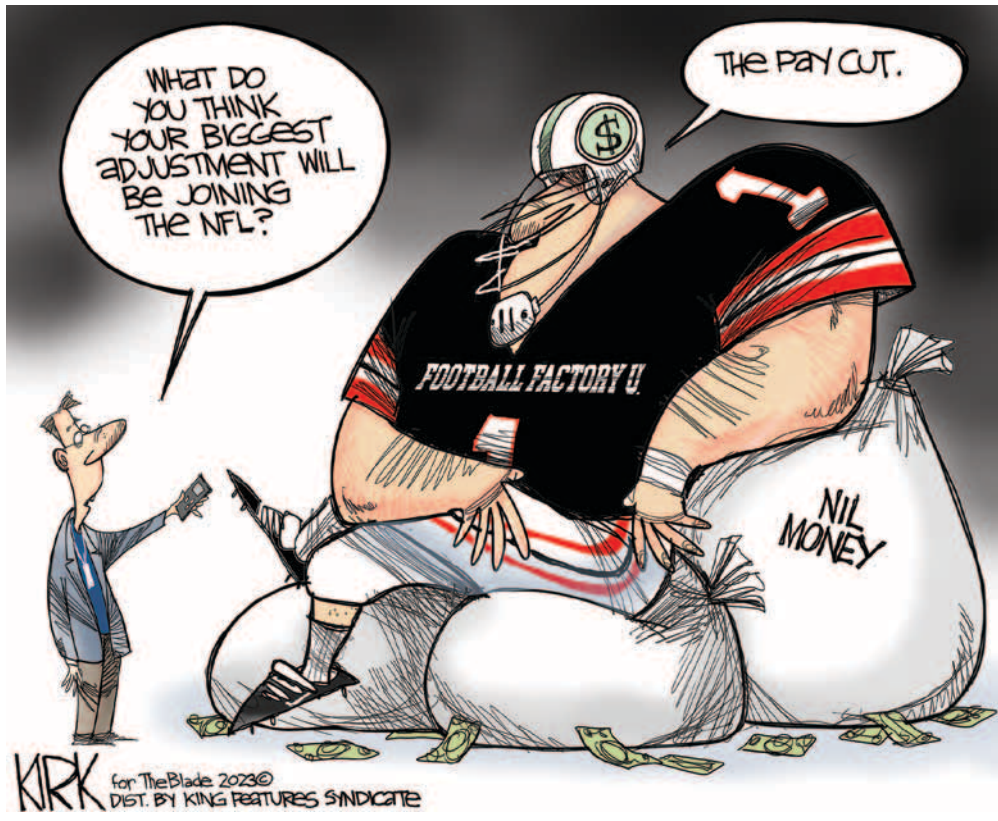
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The Week That Was - a look back through cartoonists' eyes...



Other Opinions

The regional dimensions of the border challenges

Given the never-ending partisan brawl over the southern U.S. border, it is not surprising that American voters would believe that the United States faces a wave of migration with little precedent in the history of the world.

And yet, of some 22 million displaced people on the move in the Americas last year, maybe more than 3 million came to the United States. Colombia has received more than one-third of the 7.7 million migrants who have fled Venezuela. The United States has received about 500,000.

This fact should reshape the immigration debate in Washington. If the Biden administration and Congress want to manage the crush of asylum seekers and help the unprecedented number of migrants moving across the Western Hemisphere, they might focus less on hardening the border and more on dealing with the regional dimension of the challenge.

Adam Isacson of the Washington Office on Latin America, a human rights group, points out that countries along migrants' path to the United States have few choices. Stopping migrants and sending them back home is the least realistic. (Honduras, for instance, has seen immigrants from China, Afghanistan, Angola, Bangladesh, Burkina Faso, Eritrea, India and Uzbekistan. Where should Hondurans "send them back" to?)

So countries along the way are either openly letting migrants in transit through — busing them north as Panama, Costa Rica and Honduras have done — or, like Mexico, performing a sort of Kabuki of cooperation with Washington, occasionally deploying the National Guard, which detains and expels some migrants, to keep Washington happy.

Several have tightened visa restrictions to stanch the flow. Almost every country north of Colombia now requires a visa for Venezuelans. Following Nicaragua's decision to allow visa-free entry for Cubans to continue their journey north, Panama, Costa Rica and Mexico started requiring transit visas to stop the air route from Havana to Managua that had layovers in their countries.

Still, nobody is happy with how anybody else is handling the issue. The United States wants more help stopping migrants along the route. It has provided substantial aid — committing some \$2.9 billion since 2017, according to USAID — to help South American countries address the humanitarian crisis caused by mass Venezuelan migration.

But aid groups assess that financing represents only about one-fifth of what is needed. The Colombian government has been calling for more. Overwhelmed by the sheer numbers, in May it stopped offering temporary residence to Venezuelans, so new arrivals have less reason to stop their journey north.

THE WASHINGTON POST
Distributed by The Associated Press

THE NEWS-BANNER
(USPS 059-200)
Evening News est. 1892 • Evening Banner est. 1899 • Consolidated 1929
Telephone Number 260-824-0224
George B. Wilwer, Chairman of the Board
Doug Brown, President, Publisher
Dianne Wilwer, Secretary/Treasurer
Holly Gaskill, Editor
Fax Number 260-824-0700
Periodicals Postage Paid at Bluffton, IN. Published every day except Sundays and Principal Holidays at 125 N. Johnson Street, Bluffton, IN. 46714, Post Office Box 436.

Opinions expressed on this page do not necessarily represent the views of this newspaper.

The MeToo movement is silent on Hamas

I hated the MeToo movement. It angered me that women who had waited decades to accuse Bill Cosby of rape were believed as if they were the Oracles of Delphi, and that women who had kept their mouths shut long enough to win Oscars, like Meryl Streep, were heralded for their courage.

It seemed that every week brought a new allegation of bad behavior, of neck-sniffing, of lewd looks and in only a very few cases, of actual sexual assault. But I am also a woman who has spent the last 30 or so years of her life practicing immigration law, and the last 20 or so specializing in asylum.

That means I have a deep understanding of what women go through in other parts of the world, how they are regularly "raped" in cultures that don't consider that a chargeable offense, and how sexual assault is actually employed as a war crime.

The whole MeToo movement actually undermined and trivialized the very real phenomenon of sexual abuse against women.

The one upside of the MeToo movement is that women began to speak out about abuse, even though it tended to trivialize what rape actually was. To many of us, mere bad behavior by men in positions of authority is not the same thing as having your clothes ripped off and your skin bruised and battered. But half a loaf is better than nothing, and the crime of rape was at least being raised to the same level as murder. In many ways, it is the equivalent of murder, because it destroys the human spirit.

Which is why I'm surprised that there aren't more of these MeToo ladies coming out and unequivocally condemning the spirit murder of Israeli women. As the hostages were released and sent home to their loved ones, it became clear that many of the women had been sexually abused. We are not talking about crude innuendo, denial of jobs or social media trolling. We are not talking about losing out on some plum role in a Harvey Weinstein blockbuster, or even being included on Jeffrey Epstein's list of "friends."

The women who came back from the hell in Gazan tunnels have talked about being raped over and over again, old women and young girls, married mothers and elementary school students. They have not even been able to explain every detail of what they suffered, but we can easily grasp the devastating picture. These women were victims of war crimes. In

2008, the U.N. Security Council-adopted resolution 1820, stating specifically that "rape and other forms of sexual violence can constitute war crimes, crimes against humanity or a constitutive act with respect to genocide."

It is interesting that the U.N. sees rape as not only a war crime but also a basis for a finding of genocide. Those pro-Palestinian protesters chanting "From the river to the sea" like to throw around that word liberally, no pun intended.

They seem to think that Israel is engaged in an ethnic cleansing of Palestinians because they are dealing with a terrorist insurgent group that uses people as human shields, with less than kid gloves.

They seem to believe that kidnapping women, children and the elderly, brutally murdering them and laughing about it on TikTok is the same thing as a country attempting to defend itself against murderous militants.

But back to the Israeli women. It is clear that these innocents were raped and in some cases

slaughtered, by Hamas.

You would think that every single woman who has ever posted the hashtag #MeToo on her Instagram feed and on her Facebook page would be vocal in her outrage about what happened in Gaza.

You would think that someone like Rashida Tlaib or Pramila Jayapal, women who regularly complain about the abuse of women of color, would be at the forefront of condemning these brutal attacks on women of color.

But with a few notable exceptions on the left, there has been virtual silence. Worse, even, than the silence is the whataboutism, the equivocation of those who say that Israeli soldiers are also guilty of raping Palestinian women.

My opposition to the MeToo movement was based on its tendency to trivialize true cases of rape and abuse. And it was bipartisan — I've defended Bill Cosby, Al Franken, Daylin Leach and Nick Miccarelli.

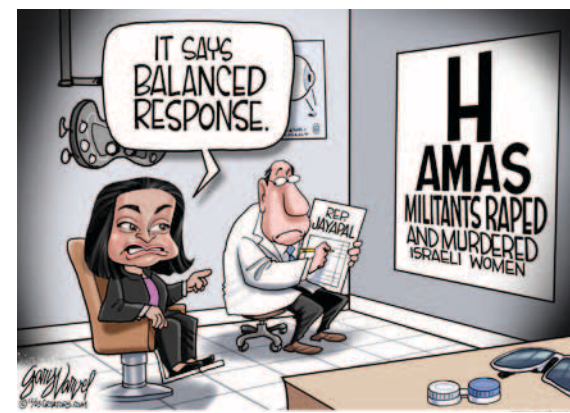
But now we are talking about rape, war crimes and genocide, and there is only one side: the side of Jewish women.

If there was any time to raise our voices, that time is now.

Christine Flowers is an Delaware attorney and a columnist. cflowers1961@gmail.com.



Christine Flowers



Today in History

By The Associated Press
Today is Friday, Dec. 15, the 349th day of 2023. There are 16 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History: On Dec. 15, 1791, the Bill of Rights, the first 10 amendments to the U.S. Constitution, went into effect following ratification by Virginia.

On this date:
In 1890, Sioux Indian Chief Sitting Bull and 11 other tribe members were killed in Grand River, S.D., during a confrontation with Indian police.
In 1944, a single-engine plane

carrying bandleader Glenn Miller, a major in the U.S. Army Air Forces, disappeared over the English Channel while en route to Paris.

In 1967, the Silver Bridge between Gallipolis, Ohio, and Point Pleasant, West Virginia, collapsed into the Ohio River, killing 46 people.

In 1978, President Jimmy Carter announced he would grant diplomatic recognition to Communist China on New Year's Day and sever official relations with Taiwan.

In 1989, a popular uprising began in Romania that resulted in the down-

fall of dictator Nicolae Ceausescu.

In 2000, the long-troubled Chernobyl nuclear power plant in Ukraine was closed for good.

In 2001, with a crash and a large dust cloud, a 50-foot tall section of steel — the last standing piece of the World Trade Center's facade — was brought down in New York.

In 2011, the flag used by U.S. forces in Iraq was lowered in a low-key Baghdad airport ceremony marking the end of a war that had left 4,500 Americans and 110,000 Iraqis dead and cost more than \$800 billion.

Holiday hijinks

Dear Annie: I'm frustrated with my sister-in-law and the way that she plans the holidays that she hosts or organizes.

This year she not only changed the day and time of our family get-together but also decided that it would be held at her house rather than ours.

I don't want to miss seeing the rest of our family since we likely won't go to other holiday events that are being held indoors this year, but I feel like, if we keep accommodating her behavior, it will continue to happen.

Dear Tired of Accommodating: My take for this year is simple: Don't go to or host indoor gatherings with people outside of your household.

Dear Annie: My husband of decades has a habit that I don't care for, and I can't seem to make him understand the problem. I have run out of ideas, have asked counselors and anyone I can that might have an answer or suggestion.

The issue is this: If he sees anything around and he doesn't recognize it, he throws it away. If you are right there, then you can stop him. Otherwise, you're out of luck.

The last things he tossed out that I didn't catch were my two photo albums from my childhood.

Needless to say, the albums contained pictures of many individuals who are gone. I can't seem to forgive him and get over it.

Dear Missing: While not considered its own psychological disorder, compulsive decluttering can be a symptom of obsessive-compulsive disorder.

"How Can I Forgive My Cheating Partner?" features favorite columns on marriage, infidelity, communication and reconciliation.

Dear Annie



by Annie Lane

BEETLE BAILEY



BLONDIE



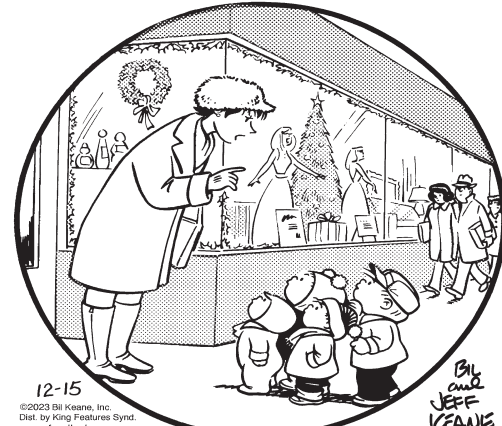
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THE FAMILY CIRCUS



By Bil Keane

The LOCKHORNS



My Answer

By Dr. Billy Graham



Message of Jesus Christ is the story of the Bible

Q: Is the Bible primarily about God or about people? It seems writers who wrote the Bible told terrific and hard-to-believe stories even about themselves. — B.O.

A: The message of Jesus Christ, our Savior, is the story of the Bible — it is the story of salvation. Profound students of the Bible have traced the story of Jesus Christ from the beginning of the Old Testament, for He is the true theme of the Old as well as the New Testament.

clear, bold message for every living being — the message of Christ and His provision that people can indeed find peace with God.

Truth is timeless. Truth does not differ from one age to another, from one people to another, from one geographical location to another.

In setting down their forthright messages, Biblical scribes never attempted to gloss over the realities of life. The sins of the great and small are freely admitted, and the weaknesses of human nature are acknowledged.

ting thing is that the lives and motivations of these people who lived so long ago have such a modern flavor! As we read, the pages seem like mirrors held up before our own minds and hearts.

The Bible is divinely inspired by Almighty God, written in ink that cannot be erased by any one person, religion, or belief system.

(This column is based on the words and writings of the late Rev. Billy Graham.)

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CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

Crossword puzzle grid with clues: ACROSS 1 Early Mongolian, 44 Jai —, 45 Mexican liquor, 6 Hot tub, 9 Dallas sch., 12 Emporium, 13 Crucial, 14 Atlas page, 15 Check recipient, 16 Reykjavik's country, 18 Surgical beams, 20 Approximately, 21 Ecol. watchdog, 23 Dig in, 24 Partners, 25 Peel, 27 Winner's gesture, 29 Night flight, 31 Already sliced, 35 Inventor Nikola, 37 Apple variety, 38 Asparagus unit, 41 Mag. edition, 43 Writer's block?, 44 Bailwick, 45 Mexican You, 47 Floral wreath, 49 Emulate Frederick Douglass, 52 Texas tea, 53 Decay, 54 Major exam, 55 Rds., 56 Wall St. debut, 57 Loses color, 3 "Babes in —", 4 Bailiwick, 5 "Don't You Know" singer Della, 6 Circumvents, 7 Chest muscles, briefly, 8 Sailor's "yes", 9 Brainy, 10 Parson's home, 11 High hairstyles, 17 Temporary car, 19 They hang around houses?, 21 Recipe abbr., 2 One-time link, 21 Mess up, 22 Picnic dessert, 24 Ball club VIP, 26 Fine point, 28 Bridge call, 30 " — outta here!", 32 "Rodeo" composer Aaron, 33 Ms. Thurman, 34 TV's Danson, 36 Deceived Palm starches, 38 Braid of hair, 40 British nobles, 42 Ridicule, 45 L-Q bridge, 46 "Carmen" solo, 48 Shapiro of NPR, 50 Inventor's mono-gram, 51 Over-head trains

TV schedule table with columns for time slots (12:15, 1:00, 2:00, 3:00, 4:00, 5:00, 6:00, 7:00, 8:00, 9:00, 10:00, 11:00, 12:00) and rows for various channels (WIMN, CBS WANE, Antenna WANE-2, ABC WPTA, NBC WPTA-2, MNT WPTA-3, CW WISE, PBS WFVA, PBS WFPB, FOX WFFT, etc.)

Yesterday's answer 12-15 crossword grid with filled-in letters: 1 ADAM, 2 VVIP, 3 AVON, 4 SILO, 5 EMU, 6 NERO, 7 EVEL, 8 RAM, 9 ARCO, 10 CASABA, 11 PACMAN, 12 REC, 13 BIO, 14 MAVS, 15 REVENUES, 16 DRE, 17 UKE, 18 TRI, 19 SPRITZER, 20 SHED, 21 ORA, 22 BRA, 23 DENIRO, 24 INTENT, 25 OTIS, 26 PEAP, 27 USER, 28 RACE, 29 ERG, 30 RARE, 31 ALAS, 32 NAE, 33 NUDE

Warriors outshoot Raiders in ACAC girls' hoops clash

By RYAN WALKER
WOODBURN — Southern Wells dropped to 0-3 in the ACAC in its 65-41 road loss to Woodlan Thursday night.
 The Raiders (7-4) leaned on the three ball to try and keep up in the first quarter, but the stingy Warriors (7-5) legged them out rather quickly with their own shooting and defense.
 Karlee Warner got the three-point parade started for the first points of the conference clash, while Kyah Thomas hit two in a row shortly after. Taylor Kneubuhler, Brooke Kneubuhler and Reagan Widenhoefer splashed one apiece and gave the game's fifth lead change in the first four minutes.
 The Raiders' hot stroke soon dispersed after hitting their first three from deep. Thomas' second triple with 4:42 left in the opening round was the last points during the next eight minutes of game time.
 Meanwhile, Woodlan kept the pedal to the medal, pouring a 15-0 run, adding two more makes from downtown by Karina Pepler and Kneubuhler's two buckets.
 While Woodlan shot just 23 percent in the game, one more than their season average, the six total three-pointers made in the first half were enough to change Jessica Killingbeck's plan in a 41-21 deficit at the break.
 "It hurt. Our game plan was the rover a little bit and

then they hit some shots that we didn't necessarily anticipate them to hit," Killingbeck said on Woodlan's first-half shooting. "So, we had to come out a little bit further, which pulled us away from the basket, which allowed them to get into their dribble drive offense."
 The Raiders shot just fine, but not enough attempts in the first half with an 8-14 showing. Woodlan created turnovers on the defensive front and in turn took 20 more shots than Southern Wells did. That made a difference for the game, as Southern Wells was only a mere 2 percent below Woodlan's total.
 Killingbeck also made a switch in the offense, attempting and succeeding at what this team does best: Getting the ball in the paint to Ashlie Needler and Kenzie Paxson.
 The forwards scored four of the team's field goals in the second half and finished behind Thomas' 11 points on the scoresheet. Needler had nine, while Paxson tallied seven.
 Part of the reason for Needler, the team's leading scorer, not getting more looks was that she was Killingbeck's best option to break the Woodlan full-court press.
 "We expected Ashley to bring the ball up for us and Ashley is not our point guard," Killingbeck said. "She's got to take more than three shots in a half for us.

We talked about it a half-time and (Woodlan) recognized she didn't get as many shots because she was the one having to bring the ball up before and we just can't have that."
 Woodlan continued to run away with the score for the rest of the game, taking 21 shots in the third quarter with eight buckets to the Raiders 3-16.
 With Thomas' team-high 11 for the night, Killingbeck may have stumbled upon a new weapon. She made her first three triples in the game and hit another jumper later on.
 She said that they moved her from point guard to wing because of her ability to shoot, and it's paid off so far. The sophomore finished 4-7 from the floor.
 "Love it," Killingbeck said of Thomas' three-point shooting Thursday night. "That was, I feel like, a good adjustment from our coaching staff. Kyah started out as a point guard, but we know how good she can shoot it. And Collena (Reeves) can shoot it really well too, Collena just has a little bit more varsity experience. So we thought moving her to (point guard) would make us a little bit more successful and I feel like it has and having Kyah on the wing to be able to just catch and shoot for us ... she's getting a little bit more confident and she's starting to figure it out."
 Southern Wells will host Northfield in its next game



Southern Wells' Ashlie Needler (middle) drives toward the hoop past Woodlan's Alyssa Anderson, left, in the first half of Thursday night's ACAC game at Woodlan. The Lady Raiders fell to 0-3 in the conference with the 65-41 loss. (Photo by Chad Kline)

at 6 p.m. Wednesday, Dec. 20.
 Woodlan won the junior varsity game 39-15. Gracie Reeves led the Raiders with seven points and Erika Beavans scored four.
sports@news-banner.com

WOODLAN 65, SOUTHERN WELLS 41
 At Woodlan
SOUTHERN WELLS (3-8, 0-3 ACAC): Kyah Thomas 4-7 0-0 11, Ashlie Needler 3-12 3-6 9, Kenzie Paxson 3-6 1-1 7, Karlee Warner 2-2 0-0 5, Erika Beavans 2-5 0-2 4, Kaylea Coffel 1-6 2-2 4, Collena Reeves 0-6 1-2 1, Aubree Meyer 0-0 0-0 0, Gracie Reeves 0-0 0-0 0. TOTALS: 14-42 7-13 41.
WOODLAN (7-5, 2-2 ACAC): Taylor Kneubuhler 6-18 4-4 17, Reagan Widenhoefer 4-10 0-0 10, Alyssa Anderson 5-7 0-0 10, Karina Pepler 3-5 0-0 8, Makenna Smith 3-5 0-1 7, Mariah Thullner 3-9 0-0 7, Brooke Kneubuhler 2-3 0-0 6, Leah Elwood 0-7 0-0 0, Emma McDaniel 0-3 0-0 0, McKenna Goble 0-1 0-0 0, Addison Klotz 0-3 0-2 0, Kyra Elwood 0-0 0-0 0. TOTALS: 25-71 4-7 65.
So. Wells 11 10 11 9 — 41
Woodlan 22 19 17 7 — 65

Three-point FG: Southern Wells: 4-12 (Thomas 3-5, Warner 1-1, C. Reeves 0-2, Needler 0-1, Coffel 0-3), Woodlan: 8-33 (Widenhoefer 2-7, B. Kneubuhler 2-3, Pepler 2-3, T. Kneubuhler 1-6, Thullner 1-6, Smith 1-1, L. Elwood 0-5, K. Elwood 0-1, McDaniel 0-2). Rebounds: Southern Wells: 23 (Paxson 8, Needler 5, C. Reeves 4, G. Reeves 2, Meyer 2, Warner 1, Coffel 1), Woodlan: 30 (T. Kneubuhler 7, Anderson 7, L. Elwood 6, Smith 3, Pepler 3, Thullner 2, B. Kneubuhler, K. Elwood 2, McDaniel 1). Turnovers: Southern Wells: 16, Woodlan: 5. Fouls: Southern Wells: 8, Woodlan: 14. Fouled Out: None. Technicals: None.
 JV: 39-15 Woodlan.



Bluffton's Rhett Gerber takes a quick breath as he charges ahead in the 100-yard freestyle race during Thursday night's meet against Fort Wayne South Side. Gerber went on to finish first in the race. (Photo by Chad Kline)

High School Calendar

FRIDAY, DEC 15
 BOYS BASKETBALL: DeKalb at Norwell, 7:45 p.m.; Bluffton at Southern Wells, 7 p.m. (JV one half).
SATURDAY, DEC 16
 BOYS BASKETBALL: Bluffton at Garrett, 7:30 p.m.; Southern Wells at Smith Academy, 2 p.m.
 GIRLS BASKETBALL: Adams Central at Bluffton, 1:30 p.m. Norwell at DeKalb, 7:30 p.m.
 WRESTLING: Norwell at Wawasee Super Duals, 9 a.m.; Bluffton at New Haven Super 10, 9 a.m.
MONDAY, DEC 18
 No events scheduled
TUESDAY, DEC 19
 BOYS BASKETBALL: Southwood at Southern Wells, 7:30 p.m.
 GIRLS BASKETBALL: Bluffton at Churbusco, 7:30 p.m.
 SWIMMING & DIVING (CO-ED): Norwell at Bluffton, 5:30 p.m.
WEDNESDAY, DEC 20
 GIRLS BASKETBALL: Northfield at Southern Wells, 7:30 p.m.

Sports Roundup

Raiders beat Indians in wrestling match

Southern Wells defeated Mississinewa 63-18 on its wrestling senior night.
Results
 • Hosgensan (M) won by forfeit at 106.
 • Micneor (M) defeated Aidan Carrol by fall at 113.
 • Max Miller (SW) won by fall over Floree at 126.
 • Ryan Raber (SW) won by forfeit at 132.
 • Robbie Freimuth won by forfeit at 138.
 • Jarin Frauhiger (SW) won by decesion 13-9 at 144.
 • Malakai Capper (SW) won by forfeit at 150.
 • Ryker Dollar (SW) won by forfeit at 157.
 • Chandler Murphy (SW) won by forfeit at 165.
 • Case Boxell (SW) won by forfeit at 175.
 • Person (M) won by fall over Kaden Bercott at 215.
 • Peyton Long (SW) won by fall over Regnolt at 285.
 Southern Wells will be at the Spartan Classic at Daleville starting at 9 a.m. Thursday, Dec. 28.

Norwell sweeps South Adams, Blackhawk in swim

Norwell swept both South Adams and Blackhawk Christian in both boys' and girls' swimming Thursday night at South Adams.
 The boys topped South Adams 100-41, and Blackhawk 97-45. The girls won 109-65 over South Adams and 125-14 over Blackhawk.
Event winners
Boys
 • Ethan Williamson, Braden Hoag, Parker McCartney and Rylan Heyerly in the 200-yard medley relay.
 • Kale Meredith in the 200-yard freestyle and in the 100-yard butterfly.
 • Hoag in the 200-yard IM.
 • Eli Thomas in the diving.
 • McCartney in the 500-yard freestyle and in the 100-yard breaststroke.
 • Williamson, Gage Reinhard, Heyerly and Meredith in the 200-yard freestyle relay.
 • Heyerly in the 100-yard backstroke.
 • Heyerly, Reinhard, Williamson and Meredith in the 400-yard freestyle relay.
Girls
 • Alaina Barnhart, Ryleigh Huffman, Marlee Meredith and Karrigan Melcher in the 200-yard medley relay.
 • Ella Krug in the 200-yard freestyle and in the 500-yard freestyle.
 • Emerson Meredith in the 200-yard freestyle and in the diving.
 • Cassie Coyne in the 100-yard butterfly.
 • Karrigan Melcher, Addyson Heyerly,

Olivia Daniel and Haleigh Reinhard in the 200-yard freestyle relay.
 • Marlee Wenger in the 100-yard backstroke.
 • Marlee Meredith in the 100-yard breaststroke.
 • Daniel, Coyne, Rilynn Ervin and Emerson Meredith in the 400-yard freestyle relay. Norwell will visit Bluffton at 5:30 p.m. Tuesday, Dec. 19.

Tigersharks both earn win over Archers in swim

• **Girls photo on Page 7.**
 Bluffton swept South Side in the swimming pool Thursday night at home.
 The boys' team won 120-55, earning win No. 7 on the season. The girls won 82-55 and pushed their record to 4-4.
Results
Boys
 • Noah Brooks, Anthony Hartman, Ashton Arnett and Evan Klopfenstein first in the medley relay.
 • Dalton Rodgers first in the 200-yard freestyle.
 • Elija Robles in the diving.
 • Isaac Wheeler first in the 100-yard butterfly.
 • Rhett Gerber first in the 100-yard freestyle.
 • Brooks first in the 400-yard freestyle.
 • Rodgers, Wheeler, Arnett and Brooks first in the 400-yard freestyle relay.
Girls
 • Ellie Coyne led the team with 16 points.
 • Lucia Corkwell 14 points.
Event Winners
 Coyne, Kierstynn Reed, Corkwell, Emily Hanse and Zoey Schmidt.
 Bluffton will host Norwell at 5:30 p.m. Tuesday, Dec. 19.

Bluffton-Harrison tops Paul Harding in MS hoops

Bluffton-Harrison won all three games in middle school basketball Thursday night over Paul Harding.
 The eighth grade boys' team won 33-23, improving to 6-3 overall. Gavin Grieser and Reid Abbett led the team with seven points, followed by Cooper Jenkins (6), Gibby Grieser (5), Dawson Lee and Bennett Stoller (4).
 The seventh grade boys' team won 34-18 and improved to 9-0 on the season. Chase Kistler led the way with 17 points, followed by Vince Lambert (11), Parker Christal, Maddox White and Wyatt Holmes (2).
 The seventh grade girls' team won 41-8 and improved to 8-1 on the season. Josie Nash led the way with 15 points, followed by Audrey Mechling (9), Gracie Jellison (6), Khloe Gehrett (5), Averie Patton and Madalynn Narvaez (2) and Aanna Croft (1).

RACING NEWS

NASCAR CUP SERIES
Last race: Ryan Blaney raced to his first career NASCAR championship by banging his way past fellow contender and 2021 champion Kyle Larson in the closing laps at Phoenix Raceway to give Team Penske back-to-back Cup titles.
Next race: Season openers Feb. 4, Los Angeles (non-points race), and Feb. 15, Daytona Beach, Florida.
NASCAR XFINITY SERIES
Last race: Cole Custer pulled away in a three-wide race with fellow contenders Justin Allgaier and John Hunter Nemechek and held off Allgaier at Phoenix to win his first Xfinity Series championship.
Next race: Season opener Feb. 17, Daytona Beach, Florida.
NASCAR TRUCK SERIES
Last race: Ben Rhodes' fifth-place finish in a crash-filled, quadruple-overtime Truck Series finale at Phoenix was enough to earn him his second series championship in three years, by one point over Grant Enfinger, while non-championship contender Christian Eckes won for the fourth time this season.
Next race: Season opener Feb. 16, Daytona Beach, Florida.
FORMULA ONE
Abu Dhabi Grand Prix
Site: Yas Island, Abu Dhabi.
Schedule: Friday, practice, 4:30 a.m. and 8 a.m.; Saturday, practice, 5:30 a.m., and qualifying, 9 a.m.; Sunday, race, 8 a.m. (ESPN).
Track: Yas Marina Circuit.
Last race: Three-time series champion Max Verstappen passed Charles Leclerc twice, the second time with 13 laps to go, extending his record for victories in a season to 18 in Las Vegas.
Next race: 2024 season opener, March 2, Bahrain.
INDYCAR
Last race: Scott Dixon won at Laguna Seca, his third win of the season, all in the last four races. The six-time champion gave Chip Ganassi Racing a 1-2 finish in the standings. A week earlier, teammate Alex Palou became the first driver in 18 years to clinch the title before the final race of the season.
Next race: Season opener at St. Petersburg, Florida.
NHRA DRAG RACING
Last event: Doug Kalitta won in Top Fuel and Chad Green won in Funny Car in the season finale in Pomona, California.
Next event: Season-openers March 7-10, Gainesville, Florida.
WORLD OF OUTLAWS
Next events: Season openers Feb. 8, 9 and 10, Barberville, Florida.

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Israel's mass arrest campaign sows fear in northern Gaza

DEIR AL-BALAH, Gaza Strip (AP) — The Israeli military has rounded up hundreds of Palestinians across the northern Gaza Strip, separating families and forcing men to strip to their underwear before trucking some to a detention camp on the beach, where they spent hours, in some cases days, subjected to hunger and cold, according to human rights activists, distraught relatives and released detainees themselves.

Palestinians detained in the shattered town of Beit Lahiya, the urban refugee camp of Jabaliya and neighborhoods of Gaza City said they were bound, blindfolded and bundled into the backs of trucks. Some said they were taken to the camp at an undisclosed location, nearly naked and with little water.

"We were treated like cattle, they even wrote numbers on our hands," said Ibrahim Lubbad, a 30-year-old computer engineer arrested in Beit Lahiya on Dec. 7 with a dozen other family members and held overnight. "We could feel their hatred."

The roundups have laid bare an emerging tactic in Israel's ground offensive in Gaza, experts say, as the military seeks to solidify control in evacuated areas in the north and collect intelligence about Hamas operations nearly 10 weeks after the group's deadly Oct. 7 attack on southern Israel. Militants killed about 1,200 people and abducted over 240 that day.

In response to questions about alleged mistreatment, the Israeli military said that detainees were "treated according to protocol" and were given enough food and water. The army spokesman, Rear Adm. Daniel Hagari, said the men are questioned and then told to dress, and that in cases where this didn't happen, the military would ensure it doesn't occur again. Those believed to have ties to Hamas are taken for further interrogation, and dozens of Hamas members have been arrested so far, he said.

Photos and video showing Palestinian men kneeling in the streets, heads bowed and hands bound behind their backs, sparked outrage after spreading on social media.

To Palestinians, it is a stinging indignity. Among those rounded up were boys as young as 12 and men as old as 70, and they included civilians who lived ordinary lives before the war, according to interviews with 15 families of detainees.

"My only crime is not having enough money to flee to the south," said Abu Adnan al-Kahlout, an unemployed 45-year-old with diabetes and high blood pressure in Beit Lahiya. He was detained Dec. 8 and released after several hours when soldiers saw he was too faint and nauseated to be interrogated.

Israeli forces have detained at least 900 Palestinians in northern Gaza, estimated Ramy Abdu, founder of the Geneva-based Euro-Med Human Rights Monitor, which has worked to document the arrests. Based on testimony it collected, the group presumes Israel is holding most detainees from Gaza at the Zikim military base just north of the enclave.

The Israeli military declined comment on where

the detainees were taken. Palestinians covered with their families for days as Israel poured heavy machine-gun fire into Beit Lahiya and Jabaliya, the firefights with Hamas militants stranding families in their homes without electricity, running water, fuel or communications and internet service.

"There are corpses all over the place, left out for three, four weeks because no one can reach them to bury them before the dogs eat them," said Raji Sourani, a lawyer with the Palestinian Center for Human Rights in Gaza. He said he saw dozens of dead bodies as he made his way from Gaza City to the southern border with Egypt last week.

Palestinians recounted soldiers going door to door with dogs, using loudspeakers to call on families to come outside. In most cases, women and children are told to walk away to find shelter.

Some released detainees described enduring humiliating stretches of near-nudity as Israeli troops took the photos that later went viral. Some guessed they were

driven several miles before being dumped in cold sand.

Released detainees said they were exposed to the chill of night and repeatedly questioned about Hamas activities that most couldn't answer. Soldiers kicked sand in their faces and beat those who spoke out of turn.

Several Palestinians held for 24 hours or less said they had no food and were forced to share three 1.5-liter bottles with some 300 fellow detainees.

Returning home brought its own horrors. Israeli soldiers dropped detainees off after midnight without their clothes, phones or IDs near what appeared to be Gaza's northern border with Israel,

those released said, ordering them to walk through a landscape of destruction, tanks stationed along the road and snipers perched on roofs.

Israeli officials say they have reason to be suspicious of Palestinians remaining in northern Gaza, given that places like Jabaliya and Shijaiyah, in eastern Gaza City, are well-known Hamas bastions.

Human rights groups say mass arrests should be investigated.

"Civilians must only be arrested for absolutely necessary and imperative reasons for security. It's a very high threshold," said Omar Shakir, Human Rights Watch's regional director.

Older Americans to pay less for some treatments as drugmakers penalized for big price jumps

WASHINGTON (AP) — Hundreds of thousands of older Americans could pay less for some of their outpatient drug treatments beginning early next year, the Biden administration announced Thursday.

The White House unveiled a list of 48 drugs — from chemotherapy treatments to growth hormones used to treat endocrine disorders — whose prices increased faster than the rate of inflation this year. Under a new law, drugmakers will have to pay rebates to the federal government because of those price increases. The money will be used to lower the price Medicare enrollees pay on the drugs early next year.

"For years, there's been no check on how high or how fast big pharma can raise drug prices," President Joe Biden said Thursday, speaking in a lab at the National Institutes of Health in Bethesda, Maryland. "Let's call this for what it is — it simply is a rip off. They're ripping off Medicare. They're ripping off the American people. We're now fighting back."

This is the first time drugmakers will have to pay the penalties for outpatient drug treatments under the Inflation Reduction Act, passed by Congress last year. The rebates will translate into a wide range of savings — from as little as \$1 to as much as \$2,700 — on the drugs that the White House estimates are used every year by 750,000 older Americans.

The types of drugs on the government's list vary. They include generic drugs, medications taken orally or injected, and treat a variety of disorders or illnesses, according to a review by the American Society of Health-System Pharmacists of the administration's list.

But all of the drugs, the White House

said, raised their prices significantly this year, many by nearly 20 percent.

The price decreases will only be seen for patients who access the drugs on Medicare Part B, the government outpatient care coverage. But the rebates are "an important tool to discourage excessive price increases," Chiquita Brooks-LaSure, the administrator for the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid, said Thursday in a statement.

Only a small number of drugs met the criteria for penalties, pointed out Stephen Ubl, the president of the Pharmaceutical Research and Manufacturers of America, also called PhRMA.

"It's a tiny fraction of overall working medicines," he said.

As it readies for a 2024 reelection campaign, the Biden administration has rolled out a number of efforts to push pharmaceutical companies to lower drug prices. Last week, the White House announced it was considering an aggressive, unprecedented new tactic: pulling the patents of some drugs priced out of reach for most Americans.

"On no. We've upset Big Pharma again," the White House posted on the social media platform X, formerly Twitter, last week, just hours after the announcement.

The president plans to make his push for lower drug prices a central theme of his reelection pitch to Americans.

The U.S. Health and Human Services agency also released a report on Thursday that will help guide its first-ever negotiation process with drugmakers over the price of 10 of Medicare's costliest drugs. The new prices for those drugs will be negotiated by HHS next year, in the middle of next year's presidential campaign.

Big pay raise for troops in defense bill sent to Biden. Conservatives stymied on cultural issues

WASHINGTON (AP) — The House passed a defense policy bill Thursday that authorizes the biggest pay raise for troops in more than two decades, overcoming objections from some conservatives concerned the measure did not do enough to restrict the Pentagon's diversity initiatives, abortion travel policy and gender-affirming health care for transgender service members.

The \$886 billion bill was approved by a vote of 310-118 and now goes to President Joe Biden after the Senate had overwhelmingly passed it Wednesday. It is likely the last piece of major legislation Congress will consider before leaving for the holiday break, though negotiations continue on a bill to aid Ukraine and Israel and boost border security.

The spending called for represents about a 3 percent increase from the prior year. The bill serves as a blueprint for programs Congress will seek to fund through follow-up spending bills.

Lawmakers have been negotiating a final defense policy bill for months after each chamber passed strikingly different versions in July. Some of the priorities championed by social

conservatives were a no-go for Democrats. Negotiators dropped them from the final version to get it over the finish line.

That did not go over well with some Republican lawmakers, though most did end up voting for a bill that traditionally has broad, bipartisan support. About twice as many Republicans voted for the bill as voted against it.

"You almost feel like a

parent who's sent a child off to summer camp and they came back a monster," Rep. Matt Gaetz, R-Fla., said in opposing the bill. "That's what we've done. This bill came back in far worse shape."

As an example, Gaetz said the House bill eliminated the position of the chief diversity officer at the Defense Department, but the final measure did not include that provision.

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